

Statement regarding the publication of the IICSA report

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA), has published its investigation report into the Catholic Church in England and Wales today. This is based on the main public hearings held in October and November 2019.

Bishop Byrne CO and the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle fully supports the response from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales:

Bishops' Conference Statement on the Publication of the IICSA Report

The Catholic Church in England and Wales welcomes the Report from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse relating to the institutional response of the Church in its duty of care to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation.

We thank the IICSA Panel for their work. The Report will now inform the ongoing reform and improvement of safeguarding in all aspects of the Church's life.

An important aspect of the Inquiry's work was the voice given to victims and survivors of abuse, including the accounts which they gave of their subsequent engagement with the Church. Listening attentively to their witness testimony has brought into sharp relief the extent of the damage this sexual abuse has had on their lives.

We apologise to all victims and survivors who have not been properly listened to, or properly supported by us. By listening with humility to those who have suffered, we can contribute to the healing of the wounds of abuse, as well as learn from those most directly affected how we must improve the Church's safeguarding standards, policies and procedures.

This is an ongoing task and one to which we are wholly committed. Child sexual abuse is a crime. It is a crime that requires committed vigilance and strict procedures to ensure reporting to the statutory authorities. This is the Church's policy. It is also why our safeguarding work needs to be continually reviewed and improved. Where there have been failings and inconsistency in the application of our safeguarding procedures, we acknowledge these and commit to actions which will bring about improvement.

Abuse is an evil act against the most vulnerable; it must never be excused or covered up. Abuse committed against children and the consequent damage to people's lives cannot be undone. For this, we apologise without reservation, and we are committed to listen attentively to the voices of those who have been abused.

This report is an important moment in our safeguarding journey in the Catholic Church in our countries. It will now be considered in detail by us, the Bishops, at our Plenary Assembly beginning next week so we can explore how to integrate the findings of this important Inquiry into the life and work of the Church in order to consistently safeguard children and the vulnerable.

Vincent Cardinal Nichols

President

Archbishop Malcolm McMahon OP

Vice-President

Statement ends

If you have been affected by this report further support is also available:

1. You can contact the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle Safeguarding Team on 0191 243 3305 or find further contact details at:
<http://www.rcdhn.org.uk/safeguardingdio/safeguardingcontacts.php>
2. 'Safe Spaces' is an independent service supporting survivors of church-related abuse. This independent service is run by the charity Victim Support and is free to access via telephone – 0300 303 1056 (answerphone available outside of opening times), email – safespaces@victimsupport.org, or web-chat via www.safespacesenglandandwales.org.uk.
3. Other organisations offering support can also be found via the Catholic Safeguarding Advisory Service at <https://www.csas.uk.net/>